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Two Generation Initiative

Catalyzing Research, Policy, and Practice to Improve Outcomes for Young Children and their Caregivers

Across low- and middle-income countries, nearly half of all children under the age of five are at risk for not reaching their developmental potential.¹ Risk factors such as exposure to poverty and adverse childhood experiences often co-occur and can interfere with children's development, leading to long term negative consequences for education, health, wellbeing, and economic opportunity.² Early disadvantage is also associated with later high fertility and poor care for children, additionally contributing to the intergenerational transmission of poverty.³

The effects of early childhood intervention are often positive and with favorable benefit-cost ratios. However, positive effects are typically small to medium in magnitude and are therefore unlikely to result in the type of breakthrough impact that will meaningfully transform the lives of children, particularly those affected by the most severe adversity.⁴ New approaches and innovation are needed.

One of the most important protective factors for children zero to five years old in mitigating the effects of severe adversity is a positive, responsive relationship with a parent, but existing intervention typically targets either adults or children. Interventions that target both children and their caregivers could lead to greater and more lasting impact than interventions targeting just one of these two groups. Two generation theory for early childhood development advocates for this type of innovation across policy, practice, and research.⁵

¹ Black, M. M., Walker, S. P., Fernald, L. C., Andersen, C. T., DiGirolamo, A. M., Lu, C., ... & Lancet Early Childhood Development Series Steering Committee. (2017). Early childhood-development coming of age: science through the life course. *The Lancet*, 389(10064), 77-90.

² Engle, P. L., Black, M. M., Behrman, J. R., De Mello, M. C., Gentler, P. J., Kapiri, L., ... & International Child Development Steering Group. (2007). Strategies to avoid the loss of developmental potential in more than 200 million children in the developing world. *The Lancet*, 369(9557), 229-242.

³ Grantham-McGregor, S., Cheung, Y. B., Goto, S., Glewe, P., Richter, L., Strupp, B., ... & International Child Development Steering Group. (2007). Developmental potential in the first 5 years for children in developing countries. *The Lancet*, 369(9556), 60-70.

⁴ Shonkoff, J.P., Fisher, P.A. Rethinking evidence-based practice and two-generation programs to create the future of early childhood policy. *Dev Psychopathol*. 2013 Nov;25(4 Pt 2):1635-53. doi: 10.1017/S0954579413000813. PMID: 24342890; PMID: PMC4745567.

⁵ Shonkoff, J.P., Fisher, P.A. Rethinking evidence-based practice and two-generation programs to create the future of early childhood policy. *Dev Psychopathol*. 2013 Nov;25(4 Pt 2):1635-53. doi: 10.1017/S0954579413000813. PMID: 24342890; PMID: PMC4745567.

Policy Brief

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IPA is launching a Two Generation Initiative to explore how two generation theory might be applied to diverse, global settings and how it can be operationalized through different approaches to intervention and policy. Ultimately the goal will be to catalyze greater attention and investment in two generation approaches across a range of sectors, and to use

rigorous research to identify the most effective strategies for improving outcomes for children and their caregivers in contexts of severe adversity.

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